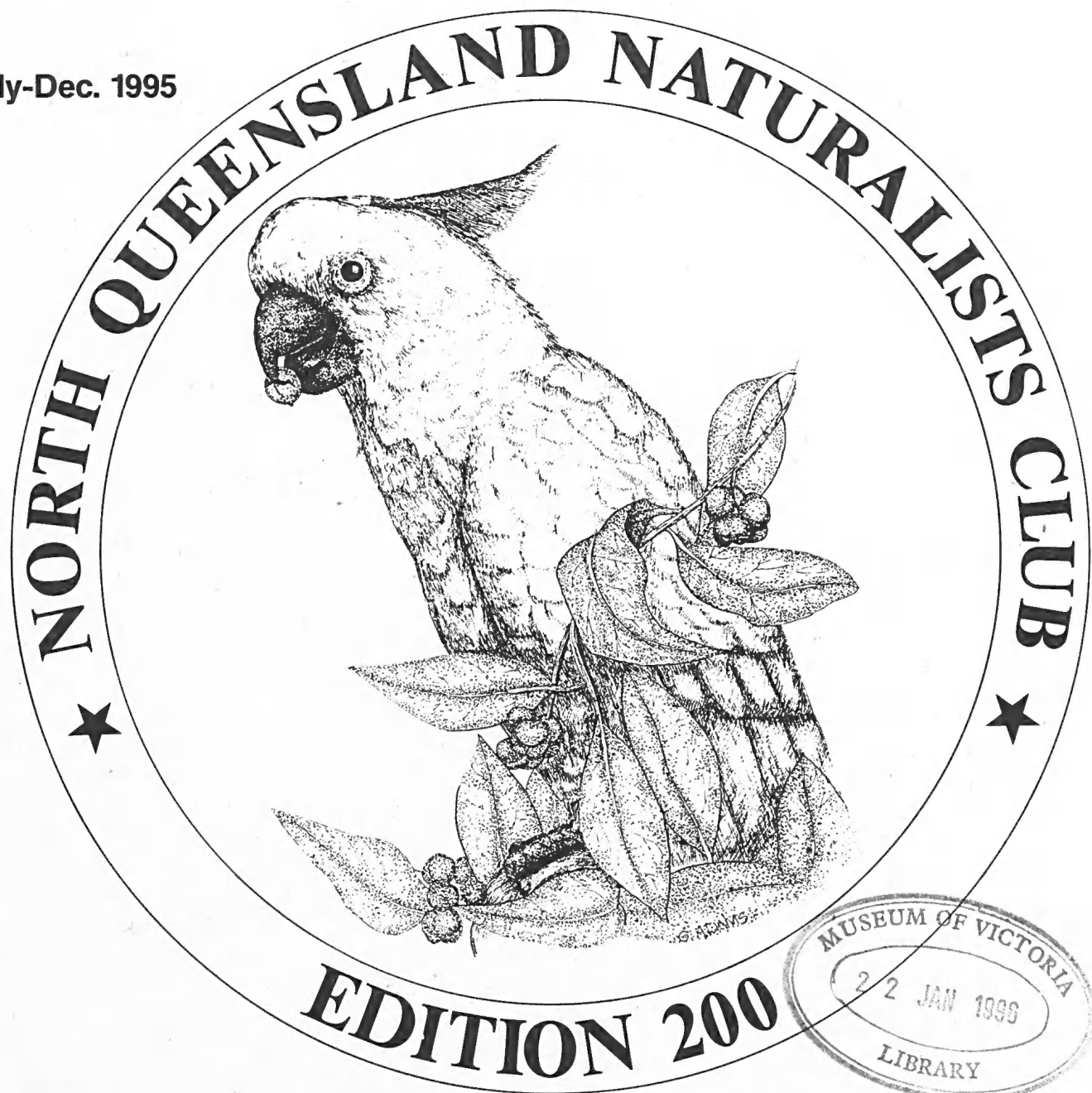


July-Dec. 1995



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FOUNDER PRESIDENT: *The late DR. HUGO FLECKER*
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OBJECTS: The furtherance of the study of the various branches of Natural History and the preservation of our heritage of indigenous flora and fauna.

MEETINGS: Second Tuesday of each month at 8pm at the Cairns Education Centre, Greenslopes Street, Edgehill, Cairns.

FIELD DAYS: Sunday before meeting.

CLUB OFFICERS:

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HON. SECRETARY
HON. TREASURER
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— MRS. DERNA ELSDON
— MS. ELEANOR DUIGNAN

SUBSCRIPTIONS: (Due September 30th)

CITY AND SUBURBAN MEMBERS.....\$15.00
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FROM THE EDITOR

OUR 200TH EDITION. Although it's not yet our bi-centenary the event is still somewhat special with an emphasis placed upon the importance of members' contribution of the articles. This Journal has a unique personal experience flavour which is a pleasure to present and which I'm sure you'll find interesting reading. Our thanks once again to my nephew David Duignan of Ega Print in Brisbane for his generosity in supplying our covers. I'm sure there is no need to explain the cover's illustration of the Sulpha-crested cockatoo!

It certainly has been an eventful year and we look forward to an even better 1996. Events on the calendar are campouts at new places i.e. Tall Timbers Caravan Park - Ravenshoe 26-28 January, and Mt. Carbine area 4-6 May. In between are the Easter holidays when we all look forward to the great 'Birdo' weekend in Gerogetown where we hope to meet up with members of the Cairns Branch of the newly formed Bird Observers Club. Day outings in and around the Cairns and Tablelands area are events to look forward to as well as presentations from notable guest speakers. You may obtain the Club's Schedule of events from Dawn Magarry should you not have one at hand. Cheers and every success for the New Year!

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STAKEOUT

By: Dawn Magarry

As members of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union we volunteered in September 1995 to monitor a Gouldian Finch site on a property some 100 kms west of Georgetown.

Between Mt. Garnet and the Lynd Junction the white Grevillea parallela was in full bloom while from the Lynd to Mt. Surprise these were replaced by numerous Grevillea mimosoides. The country around Georgetown had dried out considerably since our visit in April earlier this year (1995). Crossing the Newcastle Range we were greeted in particular areas with a veritable forest of native Kapok trees, Cochlospermum gillivraei, covered in bright yellow flowers. Further west their globular green seed pods had already developed.

We spent a day at Cumberland Dam 25km west of Georgetown as Gouldians had been sighted regularly earlier in the year. No Gouldians were seen but big numbers of Banded and Rufous Throated Honeyeaters were feeding on blossoms of small leafed Bauhinias, Lysiphyllum hookeri, and Eucalyptus camaldulensis. The resident Great Bower Bird has a new bower decorated with fragments of glass, stones, bones, silver foil, red plastic caps and ring pulls from drink cans.

On our arrival at the study site we set up camp under the only tree with some sparse shade. There was no water in the creek where we camped but by following cattle pads we found several shallow water holes about 200 metres downstream. This is where several juveniles were seen in August.

During the afternoon there was continuous activity with birds coming in to drink - the majority of which were Little Friar Birds, Rufous Throated Honeyeaters, as well as several other varieties of finches. This area was where we decided to concentrate our time.

Early next morning we set off armed with chairs, binoculars, notebook and water supplies. Shady spots were found under hanging trees mainly E. camaldulensis and Acacias.

First to arrive were the Little Friar Birds followed by several flocks of Apostle Birds which would arrive in a group of up to a dozen and perch in the tree above us - scolding and chattering to one other before gliding down to drink at the water's edge... The chatter would keep up until for some unknown reason they would all depart for the nearby scrub to return about twenty minutes later. This pattern would continue for the whole time we watched the pools.

The Apostle Birds drank and bathed in the shallows like a group of elderly matrons - gently splashing and murmuring

amongst themselves. Not like the Little Friar Birds and Blue Faced Honeyeaters which dived in like a group of noisy teenagers on a picnic.

Next morning the pattern began again, though around 8 a.m. large flocks of Budgerigars, up to 100 birds, wheeled and dipped among the trees before peeling off in small groups to settle like falling green leaves for a quick drink. Small groups of Cockatiels also appeared - these drank with rapid bobs of the head.

We decided to each monitor a different waterhole and swap places in the quiet periods. During one quiet spell we walked quite a way down stream and disturbed a lone Black Necked Stork and a Little Pied Cormorant fishing in a small pool. An Australian Hobby on swift wings pursued a juvenile Brown Goshawk through the trees, and we disturbed a party of Red Backed Wrens. Some of the trees observed in the area included Terminalia platyptera, Grevillea pteridifolia and parallela, Pandanus, three species of wattles all with ripe seeds. We noticed Red Wing Parrots feeding on one of these.

With all the frenzied activity during the morning watch we thought the afternoon would be the same after the usual midday spell. This proved to be wrong and I spent most of the afternoon watching the antics of several Two Lined Dragons, Diporiphora bilineata, making quick dashes to catch insects then leaping on to small rocks or broken stumps to sit with heads alertly cocked, alternately waving one front leg and then the other.

That night we heard a Boobook Owl, the wails of a Bush Stone Curlew and the odd screech of a Flying Fox. Insectivorous bats flew around just on dusk.

Next day new drinkers at 'Arnold's Pool' included Common Bronzewing, White Winged Trillers, Pictorella Mannikins, Banded and White Throated Honeyeaters, Crested Pigeon and Black Faced Woodswallow. A lovely Brown Goshawk (adult) glided quietly in to sit above the pool but the word got around about the precator and not a bird appeared until he was moved on by a Blue-winged Kookaburra. Once he had gone the drinking and bathing started again.

We left the study site at midday feeling that if there had been Gouldian Finches around the area they would have appeared. Between us we spent 32 hours of observation.

THE MORNING GLORY OF THE GULF

By: Noela Dell

It was Easter time again and Mal and I were off on our annual holidays. . . .

The Easter weekend was the usual great camp at Georgetown with other members of the "Nat's Club". The weekend field trips were most enjoyable with plenty of good company and of course great birding. For me only one new bird to tick off - The Little Button Quail.

We departed Georgetown Easter Monday to spend the remainder of our months holiday at Karumba Point, Lawn Hill National Park and Escott Station which is 18 kilometres south-west of Bourketown. The latter two destinations being new territory for us, we were quite exited at the prospect of spending part of our holidays there. (Unfortunately this part of the holiday came to an abrupt end at the Bourke and Wills Roadhouse 200 kilometres south of Normanton when I fell and broke my ankle. OUCH!! No matter - better luck next year!)

The 70 km trip out to Karumba Point from Normanton was a wonderful birding experience with the many lagoons and saltpans visible from the road all with plenty of water after a good wet season. Some 12 days later due to my accident I was to fly home to Cairns from Normanton, allowing me to take in the marvelous aerial views of the seemingly endless saltpans and snaking patterns made up of rivers and creeks as they wound their way to the Gulf.

As we drove through the open Savannah there were big flocks of Little Corellas feeding along the roadsides and numerous Black Kites soared above us in all directions. The prolific display of water-birds were busy feeding on the seemingly bountiful harvest of the lagoons as they started to dry up.



PIED HERON

Approximately 10km from Karumba Point the vast Salt grass plains spread out all around and numerous groups of Brolgas were seen wandering about.

Many saltpan lagoons were dotted along the roadsides and we came upon lagoon after lagoon full of Pied Herons standing shoulder to shoulder. There was possibly one thousand plus of these handsome birds all busy with the chores of the day. It was truly an amazing sight to see them all congregated there.

I was later told by a local resident it had been an excellent breeding season for the waterbirds this year with many thousands there during the wet.

Arriving at Karumba Point we set up camp at the "Sunset Caravan Park" just across the road from the Norman River and only about 100 meters from the mouth of the river and the Gulf of Carpentaria. We spent the next seven days camped there and our week passed by all too fast with many hours of relaxed fishing and great birding. Three new birds to tick off my list of "lifers" these being the Red-headed Honeyeater, Zitting Cisticola with immature and the lovely White-breasted Whistler. These birds were all to be seen within walking distance of our camp.

On our second last morning we were up at daybreak (as usual) to watch the magic sunrise. This morning was to be unforgettable as we were to witness one of nature's most breathtaking natural phenomena which occasionally occurs in low lying regions surrounding the Gulf of Carpentaria. Mal was first out of the van again with a call to me to hurry outside! Close on his heels, we both stood and looked in awe towards the Eastern horizon. We were witnessing an awesome cloud formation which just hung in the sky, stretched like a giant horizontal tube from one end of the horizon to the other. As the sun began to rise this giant white tube of cloud gently started to roll toward us. At this moment it seemed the rising sun also began to gather pace only to become hidden by the forward rolling cloud which also seemed to be gathering momentum. In an instant the sky darkened and with it the wind had risen to a speed of approx. 40km per hr. which seemed to blow this ominous mass right through our camp. Within seconds, it had passed out onto the open savannah leaving us and everything inside our annex dripping wet! As we stood there stunned and wet the sun was now brightly shining in the now clear blue sky. This phenomena, we were told by the locals of the Gulf, is called a 'Morning Glory' a very apt name I felt. Definitely a sight and experience I'm not ever likely to forget.

FOOTNOTE: 'The Morning Glory' is more common I'm told between August and November forming over the sea then rolling inland across the salt pans, travelling at 40km per hour.

UNRECORDED OBSERVATIONS OF LOCAL 'MALE' BIRD SPECIES

By: Arnold Magarry

Over the years my wife and I have been interested in the hobby of birdwatching and have been fortunate enough to observe a great number of Australian species. In so doing we have had the pleasure of travelling and witnessing this vast and amazing continent of ours.

If you are able to study particular habits of birds it is surprising the things you find out about them. My wife, Dawn, has often heard me say 'if only birds could talk - we would know a lot more about them'.

At our home in Whitfield, Cairns, we have quite a good variety of birds frequenting our garden. In past months I have noted something about bird behaviour that has prompted a great deal of thought. In different species of birds the male is quite easily distinguished from the female. In other species both male and female look alike or there may only be slight differences which are not easy to identify.

From the rear patio of our home where we enjoy our 'smoko' and entertain our guests, three bird species are regular visitors at these intervals. These are - a Spangled Drongo, a Magpie Lark and a Black Butcherbird. The Magpie Lark (Peewee) comes for his 'smoko' of small pieces of cheese which it takes from Dawn's hand or off her knee. The Butcherbird sits at the top of the steps or on the arm of a chair and also likes cheese, but from a distance of about 12ins. To date the offering has not been taken direct from Dawn's hand. The Drongo then flies in to the tree next to the patio when it hears the peewee calling. The Drongo has amazing eyesight as it never fails to catch the small pieces of cheese thrown.

The surprising part of this exercise is that the peewee that eats from Dawn's hand is a male. The female comes but the male will not let her have anything to eat by chasing her away. Both the male and female Butcherbirds are present but one will also not let the other have the food. There are also a pair of Drongos but again only one attempts to catch the food. (The Drongos never take the food from the ground).

Both the the male and female of the Drongo and the Butcherbird look the same. The peewee is definitely male. The question raised is whether it is the male of the Drongo and Butcherbird species which are the food takers? I have watched this happen time and time again and the above facts are definite. As I have not read or heard of these observations previously I would be happy to hear from others who have made these observations.

CLEVER CAERULEA

By: Magaret Howlett

For a long time, we had a Green Tree Frog, Litoria Caerulea, that lived in the spare overflow hole of the laundry tub. When it took up residence, we tried to discourage it by placing a plug over the hole. I suppose we could have tried harder and got a plug that fitted the hole tightly, but that frog was a great source of entertainment so we continued with the loose plug. In the morning we would check to see if it had returned from its nightly travels. At night it would emerge, take a leap, land with a plop and head for the garden. We would place the plug over the hole but this never deterred the frog. We would find the plug either fully or half over the hole or in the bowl and the frog back in residence. One morning I was lucky to see it returning from the garden. It leapt up the side of the washing machine and then over to the hole which was covered by the plug. To my amazement, it lifted the plug with its limbs of its left side, and worked its way in backwards. Leaving the plug fall perfectly in position over the hole. We realized that this had happened before, each of us thinking the other had put the plug back in place!

BLACK CYPRESS PINES

Unlike imported pines in formal dress,
 There is an easy grace
 In the friendlier Black Cypress Pine I know;
 She wears bottle-green Chantilly lace.

Her loosely woven branches let the sunlight
 Filter softly through.
 The birds can freely move and yet be sheltered
 From burning skies of blue.

Black Cypress mingle with gaunt Melaleuca
 And Eucalyptus tall
 That overshadow every other tree.
 The Dollar Bird's harsh call
 Floats down from soaring boughs of these old gums,
 While Friarbirds prefer
 To congregate in sighing Cypress Pines,
 On important matters to confer.

In unexpected places, one can find
 A grove of Cypress Pines,
 A contrast to the yellow-green and grey
 That usually lines
 Dried watercourses of the northern parts
 Of this, my wide, brown land,
 Refreshing with their bottlegreen temptation;
 To them, I stretch my hand.

Sybil J. Kimmins

BOIGA IRREGULARIS (IRREGULAR BOA) - A REGULAR NUISANCE!

By: E. Duignan

Correspondence has been received from Rosemary Opala of Victoria Point in Queensland responding to William Hosmer's article 'The Answer to Toad Eradication in Australia' published in Journal 198 the July-Dec 1994 edition of 'The North Queensland Naturalist Journal'.

William Hosmer's suggestion that the introduction of the Hog-nose snakes of the genus Heteroden into Australia (after conditions had been met by the CSIRO) would solve the Cane Toad problem, has been met and challenged accordingly.

William's article clearly states that 'there are those who would say that should the Hog-nose snake be brought into Australia it could multiply in number so fast that it too may become a pest, but I know of nowhere in the world where snakes are in pest proportions'.

As Rosemary points out, we have certainly been made aware recently of the anti-social activities of our own Brown tree snake 'Boiga irregularis' which has now reached plague proportions on Guam.

Excerpts from 'University News' published in May 1995, 'Snake Plague Prompts Plea for Help' clearly indicates that Boiga irregularis has also dispersed to 10 other Central and South Pacific Islands. On Guam the snake is estimated at 5000 per square kilometre and as many as twenty can be found stacked up against fences at night. While the snake reaches a maximum length of 1.5m in Australia, specimens on Guam have reached up to 3m. Reports on Guam tell of snakes biting infants in their cots and causing power blackouts by winding themselves round power lines at night also.

Dr. Joan Whittier of the Anatomical Sciences Department and Center for Conservation Biology states that already the Brown tree snake has been found in Hawaiian ports. With 13 species of birds already extinct and endangered on Guam, great fears are held for bird life and the tourist trade in Hawaii. Dr. Whittier says studies are aimed at increasing knowledge about the snakes population biology and reproduction. Why it remains in normal size populations in Australia and New Guinea - yet increases to plague proportions elsewhere. Researchers have found that here the snakes are affected by parasites and disease, whereas, in Guam they are relatively disease free. Biological control, at this point would prove far more effective than the present system of workers 'chopping snakes heads off with machetes'. Studies concluded that eventhough the snake has an unusual reproductive cycle it is their ability to disperse and not their reproduction that has caused the snake's plague proportions - it is a skilled stowaway on

ships and planes. Records indicate that the brown tree snake first appeared on Guam (an American Naval Base) in the 1940's possibly during the second world war via cargo vessels.

Although there are many species of introduced plants and animals in Australia, my own opinion (where the cane toad Bufo marinus is concerned) is to leave well enough alone. I have seen evidence where our own native bird species are adopting habits of toad eradication of their own by rolling over the toads and feeding from the toad's underbelly. These methods in conjunction with public awareness and education, I believe will cause the Bufo marinus in time to become less of a nuisance although biological control (definitely not chemical) on Guam may be the only answer for the eradication of the Boiga irregularis.



And then the bovine watchers were given a real treat.
On a small knoll, in full splendour, there suddenly
appeared a Guatemalan cow of paradise.

NOTES ON VEGETATION OF SECTION 'G' - CAIRNS CENTRAL SWAMP
BY: R. Jago

Section 'G' contains some 99 species of vascular plants, 86 species being native to the area. Murraya paniculata is native to this part of North East Queensland but it is the exotic form that is naturalized in this section.

This section is comprised of three vegetation types.

- G1. Woodland dominated by Melaleuca Quinquenervia.
- G2. Closed forest in which several large impressive specimens of various rainforest type trees occur.
- G3. Partly closed and modified areas with scattered trees. This area supports dense growth of introduced weed species which pose a threat to the remaining native vegetation in so much that they are a fire risk.

PRELIMINARY CHECK LIST OF VASCULAR PLANT SPECIES NATIVE TO SECTION 'G' CAIRNS CENTRAL SWAMP AND ASSOCIATED WETLANDS

PTERIDOPHYTES (Ferns)

<u>Acrostichum speciosum</u>	Mangrove fern	C
<u>Helminthostachys zeylanica</u>	Flowering fern	C
<u>Lygodium flexuosum</u>	Snake fern	C
<u>Pyrrosia longifolia</u>		C
<u>Stenochlaena palustris</u>	Climbing swamp fern	C

GYMNOSPERMS (Cycads)

<u>Cycas media</u>		C
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ANGIOSPERMS Dicotyledons (Flowering plants)

<u>Acanthus ilicifolius</u>	Holy leaf mangrove	C
<u>Adenanthera pavonina</u>	False red sandalwood	C
<u>Aegiceras corniculatum</u>	River mangrove	C
<u>Alphitona excelsa</u>	Red ash	C
<u>Alstonia scholaris</u>	Milky pine	C
<u>Avicennia marina</u>		
var. <u>eucalyptifolia</u>		C
<u>Beilschmiedia obtusifolia</u>	Blush walnut	C
<u>Bruguiera gymnorhiza</u>		C
<u>Canarium australianum</u>		
var. <u>velutinum</u>		C
<u>Carallia brachiata</u>	Corky bark	C
<u>Cayratia maritima</u>	Native grape	U
<u>Chionanthus ramiflorus</u>	Native olive	C

Cleistanthus apodus		C
Clerodendrum inerme	Sorcerer's flower	C
Clerodendrum longiflorum		C
var. glabrum		
Cordia dichotoma	Sebastian tree	R
Cryptocarya hypospodia	Northern laurel	C
Cryptocarya triplinervis	Brown laurel	C
var. riparia		
Decaspermum humile	Brown myrtle	C
Dillenia alata	Red Beech	C
Dischidia nummularia	Button orchid	C
Elaeocarpus augustifolia	Silver Quandong	C
Ficus benjamina	Weeping fig	C
Ficus congesta	Red leaf fig	C
Ficus virens	White fig	C
Ganophyllum falcatum	Scaly ash	C
Glochidion harveyanum	Buttonwood	C
Glochidion philippicum	Buttonwood	C
Glochidion sumatranum	Buttonwood	C
Guioa acutifolia		C
Hibiscus tiliaceus	Cottonwood	C
Ichnocarpus frutescens		C
Jagera pseudorhus		C
Jasminum didymum	Native jasmine	C
Litsea fawcettiana		C
Lophostemon suaveolens	Swamp mahogany	C
Lumnitzera racemosa	Black mangrove	C
Macaranga involucrata		C
var. mallotoides		
Macaranga tanarius	Blush macaranga	C
Macaranga philippensis	Kamala	C
Melaleuca leucadendra	Tea tree	C
Melaleuca quinquenervia	Tea tree	C
Melia azedarach	White cedar	C
Melicope elleryana	Evodia	C
Mischocarpus lanchnocarpus		C
Mormordica charantia		C
Nauclea orientalis	Leichhardt tree	C
Planchonella chartacea	Dugulla	C
Polyalthia nitidissima	Canary Beech	C
Polyscias elegans	Celerywood	C
Pongamia sp. (=RFK 3295)	Pongamia	C
Prema serratifolia		C
Pseuderanthemum variable	Paster flower	C
Randia fitzalanii	Brown gardenia	C
Rhamnella vitiensis		U
Rhodamnia sessiliflora	Iron Malletwood	C.
Schefflera actinophylla	Umbrella tree	C
Scolopia braunii		C
Sesuvium portulacastrum	Sea purslane	C
Sterculia quadrifida	Peanut tree	U
Syzygium angophoroides		C
Syzygium tierneyana	Creek satinash	C

<i>Terminalia muelleri</i>		C
<i>Terminalia sericocarpa</i>	Damson	C
<i>Timonius timon</i>		C
<i>Vandasina retusa</i>	Native wistaria	C

Monocotyledons

<i>Archontophoenix alexandrae</i>	Alexandra palm	C
<i>Cordyline manners-suttoniae</i>		C
<i>Cyperus</i> sp.		C
<i>Dioscorea transversa</i>	Yam	U
<i>Eustrephus latifolius</i>	Wombat cherry	C
<i>Flagellaria indica</i>	Supplejack	C
<i>Geodorum densiflorum</i>	Shephers crook orchid	U
<i>Hydriastele wedlandiana</i>	Water palm	U
<i>Oplismenus compositus</i>	Creeping beard grass	C
<i>Pandanus solms-laubachii</i>		C
<i>Proiphys amboinensis</i>	Cardwell lily	C
<i>Scleria polycarpa</i>		U
<i>Smilax australis</i>	Sarasaparilla vine	C

NATURALIZED AND INTRODUCED SPECIES OF 'SECTION G'Dicotyledons

<i>Amaranthus viridis</i>	Green amaranthus	U
<i>Gomphrena celosioides</i>	Gomphrena	U
<i>Macroptilium atropurpureum</i>	Sirato	C
<i>Mimosa pudica</i>	Sensitive weed	C
<i>Murraya paniculata</i>		C
<i>Rivina humilis</i>	Coral berry	C
<i>Solanum seaforthianum</i>	Potato vine	C
<i>Urena lobata</i>	Pink burr	C

Monocotyledons

<i>Brachiaria mutica</i>	Parra grass	C
<i>Chloris ? inflata</i>	Purple top grass	C
<i>Musa acuminata</i>	Banana	U
<i>Panicum maximum</i> (Giant form)	Guinea grass	C
? <i>Setaria</i> sp.		

NAT'S NATTER

COMPILED BY NOELA DELL

CAMP AT GENAZZANO CENTRE

By: Sybil J. Kimmins

The camp at Genazzano camping ground, Lake Tinaroo, on 8/10 September was a delight to bird enthusiasts, who recorded 86 species of birds seen. These included White-throated, White-naped, Yellow-faced, Scarlet, Brown, and Lewin's Honeyeaters and Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, most of which were feeding on eucalypt blossom.

A Fan-tailed Cuckoo was glimpsed, Tawny Grassbirds flitted through the grass and a Red-backed Wren played hide and seek with watchers. A Northern Yellow Robin was seen tending its nest in a tree right beside the road and another robin family was hopping around tree branches on another part of the property.

At night, a Barking Owl and a Large-tailed Nightjar were heard calling. A small flock of Brown Quail foraged around the camping area and Brown Treecreepers were seen in the Casuarinas near the centre.

Here and there in the forest, small Pittosporums bore their yellow flowers and Glochidium ferandii shrubs had pink berries which are a favourite food of Fig Parrots. Cymbidium madidum orchids grew high in old Eucalypts and a fine specimen was found at ground level on a Casuarina.

In the early morning, dead trees in the lake were festooned with Egrets. The many water birds included a Caspian Tern and a Great Crested Grebe. Whistling Kites were abundant; Sarus Cranes were seen. While canoeing up inlets of the lake, colourful King Parrots and a flock of Fig birds were observed in the trees. On a steep, rocky bank, two Amethystine Pythons were seen mating and a Red-bellied Black Snake was briefly glimpsed. Platapus were also seen in this part of the lake.

Sharp eyes saw a Sea Eagle dive and catch a fish in the lake, and saw a Black-shouldered Kite catch a mouse.

Fine cool weather made pleasant camping and walking conditions so birding numbers was the priority. The Centre's bird list was increased by several species copy of which may be obtained from the Centre.

*** ***

CAIRNS CITY HONORS CLUB MEMBER

We would like to draw members attention to the Service Awards day held in Cairns on Septemeber 9th, when long time Club member John Crowhurst was presented with a Public Service Medal by Governor Leneen Forde. John is Internationally known for his knowledge of birdlife and as a gardener on the Cairns Esplanade is well placed to assist visitors and locals with the identification of the myriads of waders that regularly migrate from as far away as Siberia. CONGRATULATIONS, JOHN. Well deserved. The Club is proud of you.

*** **

September was the Club's Annual General Meeting and all the committee members were returned to their positions. Ted Thomson was recruited as a new member on the General Committee. Welcome (Little) Ted.

The meeting was preceded with a slide presentation on insects, which was given by Les Francis. These slides were from the collection of the late Clyde Coleman. The evening's talk by Les was both interesting and most informative. Many thanks.

Friends of the Botanical Gardens Day on the 3rd September (Father's Day) was a huge success. Some inquiries were forthcoming relating to membership - which we hope may lead to positive outcomes. Thanks to the Committee and members who gave their time to make The North Queensland Naturalists Club Stall a success.

*** **

Ron and Derna have been away again! Nice to be some people. We trust you enjoyed your time with your daughter and son-in-law not to mention playing grandparents whilst birdwatching - is it possible?

*** **

A B.O.C.A. trip was enjoyed by member Ann Sutherland. The trip was the Grass Wren, Night Parrot and Gouldian Finch hunt in the Northern Territory, West and South Australia. Hope you kept a diary Ann as we would like to read of your adventure in the next Journal.

*** **

Club members Peg Cromie and Noela Dell are both back on deck after months away from the Club's activities due to leg problems. (What have you two been up to?) They're saying it's great to be enjoying the outings and the company of the members once again and thanking those who sent get well messages.

*** **

The word is out that Eleanor is going to be a Grandma again. I bet she's got a new set of binocs and a Field Guide and is all set for the occasion! Teach 'em young hey El!

ROKEBY NATIONAL PARK

By: Derna Elsdon

It must have been 4.30pm by the time we reached the turn-off to Rokeby, which is about 26 kilometres north of Coen. We still had some 70 kilometres to go and the road was slow. The terrain was undulating and winding. Every dip had water, and so required extra caution. It was sandy heathland country at first with rocky watercourses fringed with Pandanus, but this slowly gave way to open Eucalypt country with the familiar red outback soil, the kind that breaks down into choking bulldust.

Our first birds were a flock of Scaly-breasted Lorikeets flying in their usual helter-skelter fashion, Bar-shouldered Doves reluctantly moving off the road to let us pass, and a pair of cheeky Yellow Honeyeaters that flew across the bonnet as we were slowly climbing out of a creek bed. We later flushed a feral pig - and had to stop for a Frill-necked Lizard that attempted to out-stare us but then thought better of it and hurried away.

The sun was almost gone when we finally reached the ranger's house, a beautifully maintained old two-storied Queenslander, obviously the old Rokeby Station Homestead in days gone by, surrounded by green lawns, trees and a fence; the latter probably once kept the cattle at bay but now served to restrain the ranger's three children. Rokeby Station was once the operational base for an aggregate of cattle property holdings that covered an area of 11,450 square kilometres. Rokeby National Park now consists of some 291,000 hectares.

We were made welcome by Brad and Celia Toohey. Brad had intended us to camp on the Archer River (we had made a prior booking) but because of the lateness in the day suggested we might like to take advantage of a closer campsite for this night and move on in the morning. We readily agreed. It had been a long day and we still had to make camp - in the dark as it turned out. Brad took us to a nice little spot on the Coen River, about five kilometres from the homestead where we happily settled in for the night.

Next morning we awoke to a lovely dawn chorus of Large-billed Warblers, Yellow Orioles, Graceful Honeyeaters, Spangled Drongos and a Brush Cuckoo. We discovered that we were in a riverine gallery rainforest consisting of deciduous vine thickets and monsoon shrubs with very large Melaleuca.

We moved off after breakfast in search of the Archer River where we has a choice of three or four camp-sites. Although we had only some 30 kilometres to go it was via a genuine bush track which wound its way through dry open scrublands where we hoped the trees were far enough apart to let us through. As

we dropped down into sharp flowing creeks with dark murky water and clawed our way up the other side we found ourselves being more than grateful to Brad for suggesting we wait until morning before coming this way.

We saw more feral pigs that morning and also came upon a feral cat - a huge specimen, which we thought was a young dingo until we peered through our binoculars at him. We passed lovely lagoons bordered by *Melaleucas* and freshwater Mangroves, (*Barringtonia acutangula*) and covered in water lilies - big purple ones and small fringed white and yellow ones - a glorious sight. We crossed savannah grasslands and could see where a tractor and slasher had got bogged in the thick black mud, now (thankfully) dry and hard.

We finally came to the Archer River. Here there were pockets of dense rainforest, vines and shrubs. We finally settled on the 'Old Archer Crossing'. Although it was lovely and cool under the dense canopy we chose to set up camp on the outskirts. Much better for observation work.

The Archer River was very wide and sandy and even though the cool clear water ran swiftly it was very shallow. There were lovely big *Melaleuca argentea* all along the banks and knarled *Calistemons* leaning out over the water. These were to prove favourite perches for the bathing birds. Birds such as Grey Fantails, Leaden Flycatchers and Double-barred Finches. One afternoon we could hardly believe our eyes when a pair of Yellow-legged Flycatchers came in. We soon had our camp set up and then it was time to begin our explorations.

The weather was perfect and the daily readings of 22 to 33 degrees Celcius were constant (not bad for May) and we soon settled into a routine. We walked every morning, out beyond the cool shady trees and into the open grasslands. The weight of the heavy dew bowed down the tall grasses and the myriads of spider's webs (looking all for the world like miniature cast nets) sparkled in the sunlight. Here the Red-backed Wrens and Cisticolas played, while up in the treetops you didn't know whether to watch the Blue or White faced Honeyeaters, Weebills or White-winged Trillers, or perhaps Red-browed or Striated Pardalotes. Of course there was always the odd Brush or Fantailed Cuckoo, Little or Helmeted Friarbird, and, woops! Look out for those Brown Quail.

By midday it was just too hot for wandering around so after lunch we sat in the shade, binoculars handy, to watch Grey Whistlers, Spectacled Monarchs, Silvereyes, Fairy Warblers and Tawny-breasted Honeyeaters go by.

In our camp clearing we also recorded a very respectable count of some twenty-five different butterflies, with three new species to add to our list. These were Eichorn's Crow, Green

Triangle and the Black and White Tiger. We also discovered that by walking from our clearing into the dense shade of the surrounding rainforest we could literally walk through hundreds of Evening Browns as they rose in a cloud before us.

As the afternoons wore on we would go along the river banks. Here we tracked down the Trumpet Manucode and Magnificent Riflebird, Shining Flycatcher and Azure Kingfisher. We even heard a Wompoo Pigeon - but never got to see him. We watched Brown-backed Honeyeaters and Varied Trillers and one afternoon a beautiful pair of Jabiru slowly flew upstream then alighted on a sandbar. Late afternoon saw a lone Burdekin Duck go by, always at the same time - but we never saw or heard it make the return journey.

After thoroughly exploring our immediate vicinity we took the car and went further afield. There were many lagoons to check out but these produced very little in the way of water birds. Our total count numbered one Egret and one Darter. (The ranger told us later that there was too much water around and that another month later in the year would make all the difference). However, we did catch up with some little seed-eaters out on these plains though - Red-browed, Black Throated and Masked Finches. During these forays further afield we also came upon the largest Scrub-Fowl mound we have ever seen. It was in rainforest at the junction of the Archer River and Ten Mile Creek and must have been three metres high and six metres wide.

Night time had its own charm. At dusk we'd have two kinds of small bats visit, and as darkness approached we'd have to be careful where we walked as frogs would come out to feast on the insects attracted by our light. We noted four different species, but never did identify them.

Toward the end of our stay it became cloudy each evening and on our last evening the termites swarmed in from all directions. Didn't the frogs have a feast that night! For our part, we were more worried about whether or not it would rain. With all those creek crossings to re-negotiate we didn't think it would be a lot of fun to have rain just then. As luck would have have it, there was only a light sprinkling.

As we wanted to get an early start on our last morning we decided to get up when the Blue-winged Kookaburras called, so that morning we were up before the usual dawn chorus. In fact, those rowdy Kookaburras had us up in the dark. It was useless trying to start packing so we had breakfast instead and quite by accident discovered that the little bats were actually roosting in an old dead tree behind the camp. Can't say that we'd ever watched bats go to bed before! Then the Palm Cockatoos came right into our clearing as it became light. We had some splendid views, almost as if they just

wanted to say goodbye.

We broke camp and left slowly. After six nights in Rokeby we didn't really want to go. The road back to the ranger's house didn't seem quite so far this time. While we were driving along we realized that we hadn't seen nor heard another person since Brad left us at the Coen River. What bliss!

We said our goodbyes to the Tooheys and left them our butterfly list and also an update of their bird list. (We took just a 'little' pride in the forty we were able to add).

As we drove back to the Peninsular Developmental Road we enjoyed a last special treat. We were approaching yet another creek crossing slowly when off galloped four large black wild pigs through the water and up the far bank. Just as we wondered whether or not to grab the camera we heard loud squeals then out of the long grass shot six piglets. The water proved much too deep for them so they had to swim. What a sight! Six small black heads bobbing along. We unconsciously held our breath hoping they'd make it to the far bank - which they did. Our last view was of six curly tails disappearing into the grass - and our camera still on the back seat! Just another of the unforgettable pictures gathered in my mind's eye of the unique beauty and wonderment of Rokeby.

FLYING FOXES

The sky is full of leather wings,
Slowly flapping, silent things
Winging off to fruiting trees,
Hoping, hunger to appease.
The flying foxes wend their way,
Whether skies be clear or grey
At sunset time; a thousand strong,
A quietly determined throng,
Distant mountains to peruse,
There to eat or life to lose!

Sybil J. Kimmins

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We trust members have enjoyed our new 'Nat's Natter' section which will be an ongoing part of the Journal. Should any members have any items of interest please get hold of Noela (don't let her go) as we all like to know what's going on and what everyone is doing not to mention where they've been and what they saw. Noela's Ph: (070) 561475

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